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# Moral Pluralism and Goals of Moral Education within Christian Adult Education

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the way moral pluralism is dealt with in adult religious-moral education. Following the philosopher N. Rescher, various angles on the diversity of moral stances are identified: nihilism, monism, scepticist pluralism, relativist pluralism, syncretist pluralism and contextualist pluralism. On the basis of this typology certain goals of Christian moral education for adults are singled out. The results of an empirical study among Christian adult educators confirms the fruitfulness of Rescher's typology for describing these goals and provides pointers for amending them. Thus Christian adult educators combine the three pluralist goals that we discerned in a single goal, which we call a deliberative pluralist goal of moral education. This is the goal that educators agree with most strongly. It requires participants to learn to consider the various moral stances as legitimate alternatives. Agreement with the pluralist goal goes hand in hand with a democratic view of the church and openness to alternative beliefs and mystical experience.

## Keywords

Christian adult education, moral pluralism, educational orientations

## 1. Introduction

This article deals with goals of moral education within Christian adult education. In practice Christian adult education entails both religious and moral instruction. Participants are given both religious and moral education. After all, the Christian tradition consists not only of notions about transcendent reality, but also about the good life and how to realize it. In God — or some sort of transcendent reality — we experience what the good life is and then try to realize it in terms of these insights. On the basis of their view of the good life religions (like Christianity) offer people an orientation and

inspiration when they face moral choices (Auer 1973, 123-142).<sup>1</sup> Our concept of religion is based on the definition of the theologian Keith Ward, according to whom religion comprises “a set of practices to establish a relationship with a transcendent reality for the sake of obtaining human good or avoiding harm” (Ward 2004, 3). Religion is a practical affair, concerned with what people do to become better human beings:

It [religion] is essentially concerned with ways of living and acting, with commitment to a specific conception of the good and to a way of life that is empowered by participation in that good (Ward 2004, 180).

Consequently moral education is a major component of Christian adult education, which is what this article is about. We focus on general normative action orientations (values), rather than norms in the sense of more or less direct behavioral precepts. Our concern with moral instruction in Christian education stems from interest in how Christian adult educators deal with moral pluralism. For in modern society Christian adult education takes place in a pluralist setting.

Moral pluralism means that people have diverse, conflicting moral preferences, both within and between religions. They are aware of this pluralism, which has implications for adult moral education. It is not just a matter of handing down the moral tradition of Christianity. What do Christian adult educators want to achieve with moral education? How do they teach participants to handle moral pluralism? The practice of Christian adult education constantly confronts one with this situation. A Christian religious community may, for instance, have diverse views on the accommodation of asylum seekers who have exhausted all legal procedures. The procedures have been highlighted recently by the eviction of a number of families from their homes. One moral stance is that such people should be accommodated in the homes of members of the religious community, even if it means contravening the law. Another moral position is that everybody should stick to the law at all times. Yet another view is that in such cases church asylum would be a justified exception to the rule. People deal with this diversity in various ways. Do they deny or accept the existence of different notions? Do they feel that all these views merit careful consideration? Which approach should be

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<sup>1</sup> According to A. Auer (1973, 123-142) a Christian perspective fulfils three functions when it comes to morality: an integrative function in regard to different values, a stimulating function for positive action based on certain values, and a critical function regarding values and human conduct.

accepted? Does one have to choose, and if so, on what grounds? Can the choice be based on rational arguments?

This article is based on a distinction made by the philosopher N. Rescher between positions on moral pluralism. Different positions are classified in terms of the extent to which one can justify one's own moral stance. This results in a typology of options for dealing with moral pluralism (2). The typology enables us to identify different kinds of substantive goals for moral adult education in a religious context. Each type of goal prepares people for a different manner of dealing with moral pluralism (3). We then formulate research questions, sample and measuring instruments (4). Next, we present the findings of an empirical research project among Christian adult educators in the Catholic Church in the Netherlands (5). The article ends with conclusions and a discussion of some noteworthy research results (6).

## 2. Typology of Responses to Moral Pluralism

Nicholas Rescher defines pluralism as "the doctrine that any substantial question admits of a variety of plausible but mutually conflicting responses" (Rescher 1993, 79). In this article on moral education we interpret moral pluralism as a 'substantive question' regarding the choice of a moral stance (Rescher 1993, 5).<sup>2</sup> Diversity of moral preferences raises the question of how to justify one's own moral stance: how does one know or find out which stance to adopt? In Rescher's view it is the one that is most justified in rational terms. Based on the feasibility of such justification we distinguish between six possible positions on moral pluralism, on the following three conditions:

- First, the existence of a diversity of plausible moral stances must be acknowledged.
- Second, one has to choose one of these stances.
- Third, the choice must be based on rational, convincing grounds.

Rescher mentions two positions that fail to satisfy the first condition. People occupying these positions deny the existence of a diversity of plausible stances. This nihilistic position rests on the assumption that in cases of moral uncertainty *no* response is possible. Hence none of the moral stances is either considered or accepted. In the case of a monistic stance only *one* perspective

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<sup>2</sup> Rescher (1993) distinguishes between pluralism and consensus in the areas of religious beliefs (theoretical/cognitive), action (practical/pragmatic) and values (evaluative/axiological).

is considered and accepted, since it is assumed that there is only *one* possible choice. Consequently the nihilistic and monistic positions both fail to meet the first condition.

Positions that do comply with this condition are called pluralist. Here the premise is that several moral perspectives merit careful consideration. Pluralist positions that satisfy the first, but not the second condition we call egalitarian. Here the premise is that the existence of several plausible perspectives means that no choice can be made, since one (our own) alternative is no better, more correct, rational, appropriate, et cetera than any other option. The alternative stances, including one's own, are rated equally valid, hence the possibility of rational consideration of moral choices is denied. This scepticist position rests on the belief that we cannot be sure which moral stance is true and which is false. By accepting no stance one avoids the danger of choosing a wrong one. The syncretist position implies willingness not only to consider, but also to accept and combine *all* moral stances. Every stance is regarded as part of a greater truth. Again no choice is made among moral stances, hence the second condition is not satisfied.

But there are pluralist positions that do satisfy the second condition by choosing a particular stance. These positions we call preferential. There are two possible variants. A relativist position means that after considering all moral alternatives, only *one* is accepted, but the choice is not based on rational grounds. It is a matter of individual psychology (taste, custom, etc.) or outside influences (education, group conformity, social ideology, etc.). The various moral alternatives are seen as equally rational. Acceptance of one of them “emerges from considerations that themselves lack any rational basis — as a matter of taste, of personal inclination, or social tradition etc.” (Rescher 1993, 80). One learns to justify one's choice by citing a particular culture and tradition. A contextualist position implies that a chosen moral stance *merits* acceptance. In this case the criterion is the rationality of the stance on the basis of universally valid criteria. Both the relativist and contextualist positions are preferentially pluralist. Thus they satisfy the first two conditions: they acknowledge a diversity of plausible moral stances (1), and that one must not only consider them all, but must choose a particular stance and commit oneself to it (2). But only a contextualist position satisfies the third condition of justifying one's choice.<sup>3</sup> (Rescher 1993, 64–126). This classification is summarised in Figure 1:

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<sup>3</sup> It does not mean that the position I find most rational is the one others have to accept, or that the other's position is less rational. Rescher (1993, 101) writes: “[The] insistence on the correctness of one particular alternative is perfectly compatible with a pluralism that acknowledges that others, situated differently from ourselves in the experiential scheme of things, may be fully rationally warranted and entitled to hold the variant position they in fact adopt.”

**Figure 1: Typology of possible positions on moral pluralism**

plausible*	acceptable**	choice possible	choice rational	position
0	0	–		nihilism
1	1	–		monism
several	0	no (egalitarian)	–	scepticist pluralism
several	several	no (egalitarian)	–	syncretist pluralism
several	1	yes (preferential)	no	relativist pluralism
several	1	yes (preferential)	yes	contextualist pluralism

\* plausible in the sense of deserving sympathetic consideration (Rescher 1993, 98).

\*\* acceptable in the sense of deserving endorsement and adoption (Rescher 1993, 98).

### 3. Goals of Moral Education

In this section we use Rescher's typology to classify the various goals of moral education encountered in the literature. This enables us to identify six types of goals relating to handling moral pluralism. The foregoing figure (Figure 1) shows the dimensions where they differ from each other. First we locate the goals of moral education in the framework of the typology, then we indicate in which approaches to Christian adult education the goals occur. What we provide is a rational reconstruction rather than a historical description or an analysis of certain authors in the field. The goals are represented only insofar as they fit the typology conceptually. We do not profess to give a historical or systematic overview of all authors in the field of moral education. Those that are mentioned in the outline below merely serve to illustrate a particular type.

The names of the various types of goals derive from the typology, with the exception of the nihilistic position. That is because the term 'nihilist' in the context of moral education may cause confusion. To avoid misunderstanding we opt for the term 'universal non-moralist', which is more apposite to the contents of this goal than the term 'nihilist', since it is not a case of participants claiming that no moral position is worth considering, but rather that such consideration is pointless at a *social level*.

#### 3.1 Universal Non-Moralist Goal of Moral Education

The universal non-moralist position implies that participants realize that moral arguments no longer play a role in social life. On the basis of the pluralist

character of society, they are taught to renounce the question of adopting moral positions. The pluralism of society obstructs the achievement of broad — substantive — consensus on moral issues. Such a broad, substantive morality, which comprises elements from tradition, intuitions that cannot be substantiated and worldview-related arguments, can never be universally endorsed (Zwart 1993, 103). In moral counseling, therefore, we should not make use of such worldview-informed justifications, since they do not convince others. In public life, after all, moral deliberation is aimed at consensus, not at truth. In fact, the various moral positions should not be considered at a societal level, since they merely cause conflict. Not that morality as such should be thrown overboard; but moral considerations should be confined to the domain of personal morality (Zwart 1993, 69-109).<sup>4</sup> Everybody should work out for themselves where they stand. Moral authority lies with the individual person.

Such a goal of moral education is found in the 'worldview-related' approach to Christian adult education. At a social level modernization has put pressure on the integrative function of worldview-related institutions. This applies not only to Christianity as a specific worldview but to worldview-related approaches generally. Individuals no longer have shared customs, symbols and narratives of a consistent worldview at their disposal (Zwart 1993, 29-94).<sup>5</sup> Worldview-related education requires critical acknowledgment of the gap left by religion in its institutional manifestation. This gap now provides a space for individual identity construction.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2 *Monist Goal of Moral Education*

The monist type regards moral education as initiation into the Christian tradition without putting it against the background of other traditions.

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<sup>4</sup> Zwart also describes criticism levelled at this approach. One could argue that it is quite impossible not to invoke broad moral perspectives. Every justificatory practice is inescapably bound to tradition (MacIntyre) and our commitment to such a practice relates directly to acceptance or rejection of certain arguments. Indeed, the origin and location in the worldview-related tradition of the arguments used have to be traced. Refraining from citing substantive considerations is not only impossible but also undesirable. One emphatically has to draw on personal morality, *especially* when dealing with different backgrounds. If not, the diversity is camouflaged so as to avoid or manage conflict. Pluralism, although ostensibly accepted, is in fact neutralised (Zwart 1993, 181-248).

<sup>5</sup> In this regard Kunneman refers to the demolition of the 'tea-cosy culture', the concomitant of the modernisation and rationalisation processes. Kunneman 1996, 15 (our translation): "Individuals no longer shelter largely under the tea cosy of the 'pillar', worldview or political movement to which they belong, but engage in a process of worldview-related individualisation."

<sup>6</sup> This development is a concomitant of the modernization processes of rationalization, differentiation and segmentation. T. Geurts, following Habermas, works out these concepts from the perspective of sociology of knowledge. For a detailed exposition see Geurts 1997, 32-97.

One could regard this as religious and moral exclusivism, for the alternatives are left out of consideration:

Generally, it [exclusivism] makes the questionable assumption that only one out of a possible range of versions of religious truth is valid, without an adequate exploration of the alternatives (Hobson & Edwards 1999, 48-49).

Christian adult educators who pursue the monist goal want participants to appropriate the values of the Christian tradition. An example is the transmission of values. The question of *what* values to transmit is left unasked. The typical assumption is that the values to be transmitted are predetermined. Thus the contents of education are decided in advance. The premise is the values, not the participants' preferences:

... ultimately the deciding factor is not the value system functioning in the biography of the educand (our translation, Van der Ven 1985, 40).

The aim is decidedly not that participants should evaluate the transmitted values critically or learn to make moral choices for themselves (Van der Ven 1998, 125-136).

In Christian adult education the monist goal is found in what is known as kerugmatic catechesis — which centers on personal surrender to Jesus Christ — and neo-scholastic catechesis, which focuses on constructing a Christian identity, evidenced by appropriation of ecclesiastic doctrine.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.3 *Scepticist Pluralist Goal of Moral Education*

A scepticist position means that, although participants are expected to consider different moral preferences, they in fact accept none of them because the choice cannot be substantiated.

Inculcation of moral feelings — also known as emotional education — fits into this type of goal.<sup>8</sup> In terms of cognitive interaction theory emotions are formed in interaction with the context and play a major role in cognitive evaluation. In the absence of an external criterion, emotions should be classified according to their contribution to the evaluation process. For the purpose

<sup>7</sup> For a detailed exposition of kerugmatik and neo-scholastic catechesis in the Netherlands, see Hemel 1986, 78-94; Van der Ven 1982, 380-382 and De Jong 2002, 39-57.

<sup>8</sup> It is noteworthy that J. Wilson adduces the existence of a 'moral sense' as counter argument to a sceptical view of moral education. Human beings have "an intuitive or directly experienced felt belief about how one ought to act when one is free to act voluntarily", which forms the basis for their moral judgments. Examples of this moral sense are such moral conceptions as sympathy, honesty, self-control and duty (Wilson 1993, vii-26, xii).



of such classification Van der Ven proposes the criterion of authenticity, which is met by emotions like empathy and a sense of justice. The aim of instilling moral feelings is that participants learn to develop their moral sensibility and to reinforce feelings (such as moral indignation) (Van der Ven 1998, 283-337). Emotional education is not aimed at moral decision making but at the evaluation process, whose outcome or moral content is not predetermined. In this approach the aim is to reinforce moral feelings. Morality influences behaviour but is not focal in moral decision making. The focus of emotional education is not moral choices but moral feelings. One has to learn that various moral positions merit consideration. For that reason emotional education is an example of pluralist moral education, although it does not (yet) entail actively opting for a moral position. That is why it is called a scepticist goal.

In Christian adult education such a goal of moral education may feature, for example, in existential catechesis. Here the aim is to establish a religious identity by way of existential clarification. The assumption is that immersing oneself in one's existential experience affords insight into its religious dimension. Emotional education is a key component of such existential clarification.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.4 *Syncretist Pluralist Goal of Moral Education*

A syncretist goal is when Christian adult educators want participants to consider *and* adopt several moral positions. An example of such a goal is value clarification, developed by Rath, Harmin and Simon in the 1960s and 1970s. Value clarification is meant to offer an alternative to traditional goals of moral education such as value transmission, which no longer suffices in a pluralist age (Cf. Van der Ven 1985, 57). The situation of moral pluralism and the declining influence of the church, the family, et cetera have left people confused, insecure or unclear about their moral position. The aim of value clarification is to make individuals realise what they do and do not value and to act accordingly.<sup>10</sup> Moral pluralism implies that moral positions cannot and should not be predetermined. Participants are helped to become aware and develop their own moral preferences. Individuals opt freely for a position after considering the implications of alternative stances (Van der Ven 1985, 42-44). The hallmark of value clarification is that the accent is not so much on the values as on the participants' evaluation process — not so much on *what* their moral preferences are as on *how* they arrive at them. Moral preferences are neither true nor false, but are products of personal experience. One

<sup>9</sup> The goals of existential catechesis are discussed in Van der Ven 1982; De Jong 2002, 39-57 and De Jong & Zondag 1998, 27-37.

<sup>10</sup> Here we deal mainly with the awareness aspect of value clarification. The concomitant feelings, which also need clarifying, are not discussed.

cannot prescribe a preference or dictate which preferences are acceptable. Hence this goal rejects an external moral authority. Individuals decide for themselves what preference they develop for which values.

Value clarification accords with a syncretist goal, firstly because it satisfies the condition of considering several moral preferences. Considering moral alternatives is a cardinal criterion of value clarification (Raths et al 1966, 27-48), which makes it an example of a pluralist goal. Secondly, value clarification is egalitarian in that no moral choice is involved. It does not entail judgment of whether preferences are good or bad; the individual's preference is accepted. The various moral positions are not only considered but are also accepted. That makes value clarification an example of a syncretist goal.

Value clarification is used mainly in mystagogic adult education, which sensitizes participants to the religious images hidden in human beings.<sup>11</sup>

### 3.5 *Relativist Pluralist Aim of Moral Education*

A relativist goal of moral education implies that educands learn to opt for a particular moral stance against a morally pluralist background. The existence of other moral preferences is acknowledged, but the choice is based on the preferences of their own tradition. Since from a rational point of view moral preferences cannot be judged, educands are taught to choose on the basis of agreement with a given tradition. That is why it is called a relativist goal of moral education. Participants are taught to adopt the values of the Christian tradition.

We find this goal among proponents of Christian (virtue)ethics such as the moral theologian Stanley Hauerwas. Here tradition and the community are the premise of Christian adult education. A community embodies the stories and rituals of such a tradition. To live morally one needs a community in which the tradition is transmitted, and "the Christian word for that community is church" (Hauerwas 1983, 33). Any pretensions to moral autonomy have to be abandoned for the sake of membership of such a community (Hauerwas 1983, 16-43).<sup>12</sup>

A relativist goal of moral education takes full cognisance of moral pluralism. In contrast to the monist goal, participants have to choose between various moral alternatives. Hence it is a preferential approach to moral pluralism. It is relativist because the choice is rationally indifferent. This implies that our moral preferences cannot be justified by a universally valid rational viewpoint.

<sup>11</sup> For more information on mystagogic catechesis, see Van den Berk 1999, 50-63; 1998, 111-124 and De Jong 2002.

<sup>12</sup> A. Dillen (2005) assesses Hauerwas's model as a one-sided initiation and socialisation model that does not allow sufficiently for the critical, constructive input in the community and tradition of the individual's (in this case, child's) own ability to assign meaning.

Agreement with arguments is necessarily in terms of a particular moral tradition:

To say more about morality requires not simply a conception of the good, but a tradition that carries the virtues necessary for training in movement toward the good (Hauerwas 1983, 35).

We call this a relativist goal because, after due consideration of the alternatives, participants opt for a moral position that accords with their own tradition.

### 3.6 *Contextualist Pluralist Goal of Moral Education*

When pursuing a contextualist goal of moral education the point of departure is a universally valid, rational criterion, by means of which educands must learn to choose between different moral stances. Within this category we distinguish between two types of goals because of the criteria of rationality used. The criterion for the first type is the quality of the moral actions (virtues), and for the second type it is the quality of the moral judgments. We call the two types character formation and moral communication respectively.

The goal the first type is character formation. Lickona defines character formation as “the intentional, proactive effort to develop good character” (Lickona 1997, 46), where good character consists in possession of virtues. Classical virtues like fairness and prudence are regarded as objectively good human qualities, beneficial to the individual and the community alike.<sup>13</sup> Character formation entails a non-relativist attitude towards moral values: “There **are** rationally grounded, nonrelative, objectively worthwhile moral values” (Lickona 1991, 230). These values provide the moral substance that defines good character. Van der Ven’s definition of character formation waters down the universal pretension somewhat. In his view character formation implies classical virtue ethics reinterpreted in light of the Enlightenment, modernization and moral pluralism (Van der Ven 1998, 339-387).<sup>14</sup> One strategy for character formation is ethical reflection. By learning what the virtues are and what they require from us in real-life situations learners are ena-

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<sup>13</sup> Peterson and Seligman’s attempt to classify the components of a ‘good character’ could also be included in this approach. They maintain that people’s notions of goodness vary, but that there are six categories of ‘core virtues’ that have been accepted in all cultures through the ages: wisdom, courage, humaneness, justice, moderation and transcendence. Here, too, we find that the goal of character building is linked to universal pretensions (Peterson & Seligman 2004, 3-16).

<sup>14</sup> The reinterpretation is inspired by Ricoeur and implies that it is not premised on universally valid virtues, but that one has to work out inductively which virtues are appropriate in a given context.

bled to reason morally and take corresponding decisions (Van der Ven 1998, 55, Cf. Lockwood 1997, 174-185).

The second type of contextualist goal entails value communication. The rational criterion of choice between moral preferences is the argumentative quality of the communication. The aim is not to transmit moral preferences but learn how to argue in order to arrive at a morally sound decision. Participants learn to make such decisions (in each particular case) by way of moral argumentation. Van der Ven defines value communication as developing the skill of dealing with conflicting moral preferences. It consists in willingness to transpose oneself to different perspectives (i.e. exchanging perspectives). This means that one tries to adopt the other party's perspective so as to understand his or her assumptions and premises. If the other does the same, the outcome is mutual understanding of convictions, values and feelings (Van der Ven 1992). But it does not stop at subjective evaluation of moral preferences; their ethical quality is also pertinent. That is why the criterion of accepting a moral preference does not lie in the subjective processes but in communicative reasoning. These arguments are used to evaluate moral preferences and decide which one deserves to be passed on. The authority is not convention or a charismatic leader; argumentative reason is the sole authority. Every point of view can be presented, every value considered, but the only moral preferences that pass the test are those that are rationally defensible (Van der Ven 1985, 29-39, 51).<sup>15</sup>

Character formation and value communication are important in critical catechesis. With the aid of critical theological insights participants learn to contemplate the religious dimension independently (also see Van der Ven 1982, 401-425, 378; De Jong 1998, 137-151; De Jong and Zondag 1998, 27-37). Participatory adult education likewise sets a contextualist goal for moral education. Religion is seen as religious practices embedded in praxis communities. Only by participating in religious practices like Bible reading or religiously inspired social engagement does one gain insight into the meaning of religion and only then does one develop a religious and moral identity (Hermans 2002; Hermans 2003).

### 3.7 *Research Questions*

Having described the six types of goals for moral education, we proceed to formulate the following research questions:

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<sup>15</sup> Another example of this form of contextualist moral education is Kohlberg's concept of moral development. The highest level of moral development is the sixth, 'post-conventional' stage, when the person no longer acquires specific values but refers to the underlying universal moral principles that need to be determined rationally. Cf. Van der Ven 1998, 181-234.

1. What goals of moral education are recognised by Christian adult educators?
2. To what extent do they agree with these goals?
3. How do the goals correlate?
4. Who are the social carriers of the various goals?

#### 4. Empirical Research

##### 4.1 *Research Questions*

We formulate the following research questions of our research:

1. What goals of moral education are recognised by Christian adult educators?
2. To what extent do they agree with these goals?
3. How do the goals correlate?
4. Who are the social carriers of the various goals?

##### 4.2 *Sample*

Our empirical research was conducted among adult catechists and counselors working in a Catholic context in the Netherlands, namely:

- Adult catechists in parishes
- Pastors charged with adult religious education
- Counselors at religious counseling and meditation centers
- Teachers at pastoral schools<sup>16</sup>
- Theologically trained volunteers experienced in Christian adult education

The population comprised about 500, each of whom received a questionnaire. A total of 151 completed questionnaires were returned, amounting to a response rate of some 30%.

##### 4.3 *Measuring Instruments*

Our research questions pertain to the types of goals of moral education for adults presented in the theoretical section. To make these goals measurable we used indicators of facets that distinguish one goal from another. The reader is referred to Figure 1, which summarises possible stances on moral pluralism.

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<sup>16</sup> A pastoral school is usually a two-year training course for parish volunteers.

**Figure 2: Overview of indicators of types of goals of moral education**

	<b>how many plausible</b>	<b>how many acceptable</b>	<b>goal</b>
<b>universal non-moralistic</b>	no moral position considered	no moral position accepted	awareness that moral considerations play no role in society
<b>monistic</b>	one moral position considered	one moral position accepted	adopt Christian moral position
<b>scepticist</b>	several moral positions considered	several moral positions accepted	reinforce moral feelings
<b>syncretist</b>	several moral positions considered	several moral positions accepted	clarify own moral position
<b>relativist</b>	several moral positions considered	one moral position accepted	develop preference for moral position corresponding with Christian culture
<b>contextualist</b>	several moral positions considered	one moral position accepted	learn to choose the right moral position through moral argumentation

On the basis of these indicators we operationalised each goal by means of items. In the questionnaire the items were provided with a Likert scale<sup>17</sup> and submitted to the Christian adult educators. An example of an item meant to measure a monist goal is the following: "Participants adopt values that conform to the Christian tradition." The following item is meant to measure a contextualist goal: "Participants learn to choose between values on the basis of morally sound arguments." In the appendix, we have included the measuring instruments for the independent variables.

## 5. Results

The first research question about Christian adult educators' goals for moral education we answered by means of factor analysis. Responses were subjected to factor analysis to reveal the interrelationship between items. Our assumption was that interrelationships between items stem from underlying factors that are not directly observable. Factor analysis is a dimensional technique for

<sup>17</sup> They range from 1 (disagree totally) to 5 (totally agree).

**Table 1: Oblimin rotated factor matrix, commonality ( $h^2$ ) and percentage explained variance in regard to goals of moral education<sup>18</sup>**

item	$h^2$	f1	f2	f3
participants learn to appreciate that values do not really feature in public life	.65	<b>.78</b>		–.21
participants will realise that values have hardly any influence in public life these days	.52	<b>.72</b>		
participants adopt Christian values	.70		<b>.83</b>	
participants adopt values that accord with the Christian tradition	.68		<b>.82</b>	
participants learn to choose from the totality of moral values those that accord with our Christian culture	.63		<b>.79</b>	
from the multiplicity of values participants develop a preference for those that prevail in our Christian culture	.61		<b>.77</b>	
participants learn to make sound moral decisions after evaluating diverse moral values	.65			<b>.79</b>
participants learn to choose among different values on the basis of sound argumentation	.55			<b>.73</b>
participants learn to clarify their own moral values	.57		–.23	<b>.69</b>
participants learn to enhance their moral sensibility	.55	–.29		<b>.67</b>
participants become aware of their moral values	.62	–.40		<b>.67</b>
participants learn to consider what the right moral behaviour is in each situation	.42			<b>.63</b>
participants learn to make proper moral choices in real-life situations	.38		.24	<b>.57</b>
explained variance	57,9 %			

Factor loadings below .20 were left out

Legend:

f1 = universal non-moralist goal of moral education

f2 = preferential monist goal of moral education

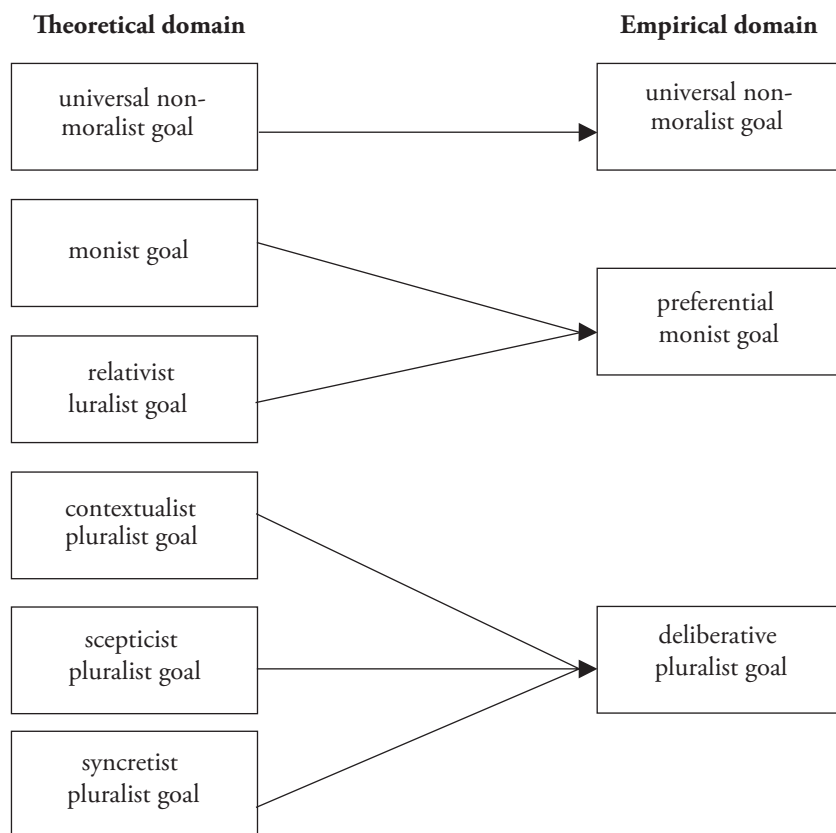
f3 = deliberative pluralist goal of moral education

tracing such latent, non-observable factors. For our purpose we chose free factor analysis, implying that clustering of items is directed by the Christian adult educators thinking. The result of this analysis is shown in Table 1.

Our theoretical framework led us to expect six factors, but the analysis yielded only three, which we labelled ‘universal non-moralist goal’, ‘preferential monist goal’ and ‘deliberative pluralist goal’. Figure 3 illustrates the difference between the theoretical and empirical domains.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> One item was removed because of excessively low commonality. It falls under the scepticist goal of moral education and reads: “Participants develop a sense of moral indignation.”

<sup>19</sup> For ease of reference this figure deviates from the sequence in the preceding tables, in that the preferential variant of pluralist education appears above the egalitarian variant.

**Figure 3: Relation between theoretical and empirical domains regarding types of goals of moral education**

The squares in the first column (theoretical domain) contain the six theoretical concepts in our typology of goals of moral education. The squares in the second column (empirical domain) contain the three factors yielded by our analysis. The first factor corresponds exactly with the concept of a universal non-moralist goal of moral education. The second factor comprises items from two theoretical scales — the monist and relativist pluralist goals of moral education. The common denominator between these goals is that both entail opting for a particular moral preference. Clearly educators do not differentiate whether their choice of a goal entails consideration of alternatives (relativist) or not (monist). Since in both instances it is ultimately a choice of just one moral preference, we label the factor 'preferential monist goal'. The third factor is a hybrid of the remaining forms of pluralist goals, comprising items from the contextualist, scepticist and syncretist goals of moral education.



**Table 2: Reliability of scales of types of goals of moral education (N=149)**

Goal	items	alpha
universal non-moralist goal	2	.75
preferential monist goal	4	.88
deliberative pluralist goal	7	.86

**Table 3: Mean scale scores and standard deviation (s.d.) of types of goals of moral education (N=149)**

Goal	mean	s.d.
universal non-moralist goal	1.7	.74
preferential monist goal	3.3	.79
deliberative pluralist goal	4.1	.55

On the basis of the common denominator among the three goals — that is, consideration of several moral preferences — we call this factor the deliberative pluralist goal. In the theoretical section we identified three types of pluralist goals, but in the empirical domain we found that adult educators do not distinguish between them, hence we label it ‘deliberative pluralist goal’. In the concluding section we return to this point.

To sum up, Christian adult educators identify three goals of adult moral education: an universal non-moralist goal, a preferential monist and a deliberative pluralist goal. Table 2 shows the three scales and their reliability.

The table reflects high values. The reliability of a scale tells us something about the correlation of the items. A low correlation indicates that it is sheer chance that the items relate in this manner. The higher the reliability of the scale, the stronger the correlation between items.

The second research question concerns the extent to which Christian adult educators agree with the goals of moral education. The answer to the question appears in Table 3.

As is evident in the table, Christian adult educators agree least with an universal non-moralist goal. The mean scale score of 1.7 implies rejection of this goal. Agreement with a preferential monist goal is significantly higher (3.3). Although this score falls in the area of ambivalence (2.6-3.4), it manifestly inclines to agreement. The deliberative pluralist goal scores the highest agreement (4.1). The high mean scale score implies that adult catechists concur with a deliberative pluralist goal entailing consideration of several moral alternatives. As for the spread of individual scores within the mean scale score (see

standard deviation), dispersion is widest in the case of goals that are accorded least agreement: the universal non-moralist goal (.74) and the preferential monist goal (.79). The deliberative pluralist goal has a noticeably lower dispersion (.55). It means that the educators collectively disagree less with the deliberative pluralist goal than with the universal non-moralist and preferential monist goals. Not only do they agree most with the deliberative pluralist goal, but there is also greater consensus among them.

To answer the third research question we turn to relevant ( $r > .20$ ) and significant ( $p > 0.01$ ) correlations between the various types of goals. We find only one significant correlation — the weak negative correlation between the universal non-moralist and deliberative pluralist goals of moral education ( $r = -.25$ ). It means that the less the counselors agree with the statement that no moral position need be considered and accepted (universal non-moralist), the more they agree with the statement that *all* values should be considered (deliberative pluralist). This negative correlation accords with the logic of our typology. The preferential monist goal does not correlate with the other two goals.

The question about the social carriers of the various goals of moral education is answered by determining whether differential agreement with the goals correlates with certain aspects of the religious institutional beliefs and practices of Christian adult educators. We chose beliefs and practices that we expected to relate to agreement with the various types of goals.<sup>20</sup> The educators work in the institutional context of the church, either as catechists or parish pastors, or as counselors at church affiliated centers. We thought that attitudes towards doctrinal authority would affect agreement with the various goals of moral education, so we choose the believing aspects of concept of the church and conformity with ecclesiastic policy. As acting aspects we choose different forms of spirituality. Daily prayer plays a major role in ecclesiastically defined spirituality (intra-institutional). A focus on mystical experience and alternative beliefs indicates a less institutionally oriented form of spirituality (extra-institutional).

Table 4 shows the correlations between these aspects and agreement with the goals of moral education.

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<sup>20</sup> Questions about these characteristics are included in our questionnaire. See Appendix for the instruments used to measure the the religious institutional beliefs and practices of Christian adult educators.

**Table 4: Relevant (>.20) and significant\* correlations (Pearsons r) between educators’ religious institutional beliefs and practices and types of goals of moral education**

	universal non-moralist	preferential monist	deliberative pluralist
centralised decision making		.40**	-.31**
conformity with ecclesiastic policy		.40**	
prayer		.41**	
mystical experience		-.35**	.30**
alternative beliefs			.27**

\*  $p < 0.01$  \*\*  $p < 0.001$

We observe that agreement or disagreement with the universal non-moralist goal is not associated with any profile, that is, it does not correlate with educators’ religious institutional beliefs and practices. Rejection of this goal is spread throughout the sample rather than confined to a particular group. Agreement with the preferential monist and deliberative pluralist goals, however, is greatly influenced by educators’ religious institutional beliefs and practices. The table shows that agreement with a preferential monist goal of moral education implies agreement with a hierarchic conception of a centrally administered church ( $r .40$ ). In addition educators who subscribe to a preferential monist goal are more inclined to observe official ecclesiastic policy ( $r .40$ ), pray more regularly ( $r .41$ ) and report fewer mystical experiences ( $r -.35$ ).

Educators who agree with a deliberative pluralist goal also have a distinctive ecclesiastic profile. Those who endorse this goal reject centralised decision making within the church ( $r -.31$ ), and at the level of acting they report more mystical experiences ( $r .30$ ) and greater interest in themes of alternative beliefs ( $r .27$ ). In fact, these educators are roughly the reverse of those who agree with a preferential monist goal.

**6. Summary and Discussion**

What are the principal conclusions of the empirical data on goals of moral education? We briefly recapitulate the results with reference to the four research questions, whereupon we take a closer look at some remarkable findings and raise some policy issues emanating from these findings.

1. The research data reveal that Christian adult educators discern three types of goals of moral education: a universal non-moralist, a preferential monist and a deliberative pluralist goal. Remarkably, in their minds a monist goal is linked to a relativist (pluralist) goal. A relativist pluralist goal entails the choice of a specific moral position (here a Christian one). Although several moral positions are considered, ultimately only one of these is deemed acceptable. A monist goal corresponds with this relativist pluralist perspective inasmuch as only one moral position is acceptable, but it differs in that only one position is considered.

How should one interpret this link between monist and relativist pluralist goals? It seems to suggest that the choice of a moral position in a pluralist society presupposes awareness of moral pluralism. Following the sociologist of religion Peter Berger one could call it the 'tragedy of orthodoxy'. In his view the modern world is characterised by the 'heretical imperative' to choose (Berger 1979). In an age of religious pluralism the multiplicity of ideas and lifestyles makes people aware of the existence of alternative lifestyles and traditions.<sup>21</sup> Not only is it possible to choose between them, it has even become imperative:

Modernity multiplies choices and concomitantly reduces the scope of what is experienced as destiny. In the matter of religion, as indeed in other areas of human life and thought, this means that the modern individual is faced not just with the opportunity but with the necessity to make choices as to his beliefs (Berger 1979, 30).

The realisation that one chooses a particular tradition means that it is no longer taken for granted that the Christian tradition is the only plausible option (as in monism). That is the 'tragedy of orthodoxy'; "The orthodox must then present to himself as fate what he knows empirically to be a choice" (Berger 1979, 30). In a pluralist age even orthodox believers realize that their religious beliefs are ultimately a matter of choice (Berger 1979, 11-31, 60-65; Cf. Berger 1967). Even though the educators' aim is that participants should opt for one particular moral preference, they know full well that the choice is made against a background of moral pluralism. All that remains is a qualified monism, in the knowledge that one has taken a decision. That is why we speak of preferential monism.

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<sup>21</sup> Berger's analysis does not apply only to religion but also to morality. Berger 1979, 26: "It will be clear by now that religion is by no means the only area of experience and thought affected by the transition from fate to choice. Morality, for one, is crucially affected, as are all institutions (notably political ones) that lay claim to any kind of moral authority."

Another surprising result is that the deliberative pluralist goal comprehends three pluralist goals. They are similar in that all three entail the plausibility of diverse moral positions. They differ in that ultimately one accepts none (scepticist), only one (contextualist) or several (syncretist) of these preferences. They differ on the availability of criteria that will help one to determine which moral position is preferable.

How does one explain the convergence of such differing, mutually exclusive approaches? One explanation is to regard the purpose of moral consideration as a search for moral truth rather than consensus. Striving for consensus may obviate conflict, but fundamental contradictions are obscured. Only by allowing for dissent does one take proper account of the complexity of the moral situation. Substantive disagreement presents a challenge and a reason to continue the dialogue. Enforcing consensus may prematurely cut short the hermeneutic process of confrontation and search for truth.<sup>22</sup> A hermeneutic ethical approach to moral pluralism such as that of the ethicist Hub Zwart and others puts the accent on the process of moral deliberation rather than assent to a particular moral choice. A situation of moral pluralism requires maximum deliberation. Although the outcome is still a decision, one is aware that it does not conclude the process. The idea is to broaden and deepen the process of moral deliberation. Zwart calls it a pluralist imperative, which implies readiness to deliberate.<sup>23</sup> Deliberation consists in exchanging arguments and critically testing these (Zwart 1993, 261-264; Rescher 1993, 98-126; Jansen 1994, 55, 84-86).

We do have the ability to weigh up evidence and can be held accountable if we do not carry out adequate enquiry before passing judgment, or are not sufficiently concerned to determine rationally the issue one way or the other. [...] we condemn the political or religious fanatic's narrowness in not considering all the available evidence or for not considering alternative viewpoints (Hobson and Edwards 1999, 87).

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<sup>22</sup> Rescher, too, explicitly objects to approaches to pluralism that aim primarily at reaching consensus. Rescher 1993, 3-4: "[...] it opposes the aprioristic rationalism inherent in neo-contractarian theory — alike in the idealized communicative contract version promoted in continental European philosophy by Jürgen Habermas and in the idealized social-contract version of the theory of political justice promoted in the Anglo-American context by John Rawls."

<sup>23</sup> In this context reference is made to the ethics of believing. According to Hobson and Edwards acceptance of a particular religious belief is accompanied by epistemological obligations and moral responsibility for the consequences. Everyone is in duty bound to weigh the available arguments for their own and other people's religious beliefs. On the assumption that others do the same and that their beliefs are therefore based on sound reasons, we have to respect their religious convictions. Hobson & Edwards, 1999, 85-90.

The combined pluralist goal that we found among the educators may be regarded as a form of moral deliberation. That is why we end up by calling it the deliberative pluralist goal.

2. The Christian adult educators agree most with the deliberative pluralist goal. The preferential monist goal falls in the area of ambivalence, albeit inclining to agreement. The universal non-moralist goal is rejected. The educators appear to allow for moral pluralism in the sense that they teach participants to consider moral alternatives.

The goal of deliberative pluralism allows most fully for moral argumentation in a context of diversified moral preferences from different religious and nonreligious traditions. Preferential monism, while recognising pluralism, considers only one position morally acceptable. The normative correctness of one moral position is assumed, so alternative positions are not considered. That is where deliberative pluralism pursues the critical argument further, in that several positions are taken to be acceptable and are weighed up in critical debate. What is ultimately accepted is the upshot of an argued debate on several moral positions. The counsellors' preference for a deliberative pluralist goal is a good point of departure for Christian adult education in a pluralist society.

3. The universal non-moralist and deliberative pluralist goals correlate negatively. This result concurs with the logical structure of our typology. After all, agreeing with the statement that no moral position need be considered precludes agreement with the statement that one has to consider several moral positions. There is no correlation between the preferential monist goal and the deliberative pluralist goal. On the basis of our typology we anticipated a negative correlation, since it makes a big difference whether only one moral tradition is considered acceptable or several. But the monism that emerged from our research differs from our theoretical definition of monism. Preferential monism deems only one position acceptable but several are seen as plausible. It is this awareness of moral pluralism that preferential monism and deliberative pluralism have in common. In light of this parallel it is understandable that the educators do not find the two goals contradictory. In other words, agreement with the deliberative pluralist goal and agreement with the preferential monist goal are not mutually exclusive.
4. Finally we take a look at the connection between the institutional context and agreement with the foregoing goals. Educators who subscribe to a preferential monist goal show marked signs of a hierarchic concept of the church, are very

much guided by official ecclesiastic policy in performing their task, and indicate that they pray more regularly than other educators. These characteristics suggest that educators who strongly endorse this goal have a pronounced institutional profile of submission to authority. Those who show a marked preference for deliberative pluralism reject centralised decision making within the church and have a more extra-institutional religious profile, being open to mystical experience and alternative beliefs. The correlation of the religious institutional beliefs and practices of Christian adult educators and agreement with the two goals is perfectly understandable. Educators who aspire to have only the Christian moral preference considered and accepted will be more inclined than educators who pursue a pluralist goal to have their work directed by a centralised ecclesiastic doctrinal authority (hierarchical concept of the church), and will therefore adhere more strictly to its guidelines.

Deliberative pluralism requires Christians to deal with moral pluralism *argumentatively*. Educators endorsing this goal are acting in a way that is characterised by openness to mystical experience and alternative beliefs and rejection of centralised decision making within the church.

What does that mean in the context of ecclesiastic politics in the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, which sometimes can put great emphasis on submission to doctrinal authority and leaves less scope for alternative moral ideas? Educators with a definite preference for the deliberative pluralist goal will clearly find the current ecclesiastic dispensation stressful. There are three possibilities: they either have to endure the strain; or give up their jobs as religious adult educator; or conform to prevailing ecclesiastic policy, which sometimes offers little institutional support for a deliberative pluralist goal. The last two options have the same result, namely less interest in deliberative pluralist goals in Christian adult education. Our research data indicate that a fair group of educators are caught in the dilemma. The problem is organizational rather than individual. It concerns professionals in a particular institutional context, that of the Catholic Church in the Netherlands, who might have difficulties to do their work according to their own professional notions. Ecclesiastic policy makers should at least be prepared to discuss the problem in their capacity as good employers, if possible with a deliberative attitude.

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## **Appendix: Measuring Instruments Aspects of Educators' Institutional Beliefs and Practices**

### **1. Concept of church (believing)**

Attitudes towards centralised ecclesiastic decision-making structures were measured with an instrument taken from Jeurissen (1993, 154-156, 179). The items read as follows:

- Believers should decide for themselves what happens in the church.
- It is not a good thing for believers to co-determine everything that happens in the church.
- It is not a good idea for every believer to have a hand in ecclesiastic decisions.
- The church is best managed by a few authoritative persons who take responsibility for it.
- Responsibility for what happens in the church should not be in the hands of a small group of managers.
- Church policy should be laid down by a few responsible managers.

### **2. Conformity with ecclesiastic policy (believing)**

Educators' conformity with ecclesiastic policy was measured by asking them whether and to what extent they are guided by the following in case of differences about catechetical contents:

- Guidelines of diocesan church authorities
- Policy directives of their institution/deanery/parish
- Agreements with colleagues

### **3. Prayer (acting, intra-institutional)**

Prayer patterns were measured by asking them how often they pray.

### **4. Mystical experience (acting, extra-institutional)**

Mystical experience was measured by asking whether and how often educators have had the following experiences:

- Have you ever had a sense of union with all things?
- Have you ever had an experience in which time and space ceased to exist?
- Have you ever had an experience that you would call sacred?
- Have you ever had a feeling that everything is perfect?
- Have you ever had an experience that left you with a feeling of wonderment?

**5. Alternative religiosity (acting, extra-institutional)**

Alternative religiosity was measured by asking which of following alternative topics educators read about in books or journals, or learn about in lectures:

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> mysticism          | <input type="checkbox"/> shamanism            | <input type="checkbox"/> gnosticism               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> esoterics          | <input type="checkbox"/> alternative medicine | <input type="checkbox"/> Taoism                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> teachers/gurus     | <input type="checkbox"/> runes                | <input type="checkbox"/> theosophy                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> astrology          | <input type="checkbox"/> numerology           | <input type="checkbox"/> new scientific paradigms |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I-Ching            | <input type="checkbox"/> yoga                 | <input type="checkbox"/> New Age                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tarot              | <input type="checkbox"/> anthroposophy        | <input type="checkbox"/> tantra                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> course of miracles | <input type="checkbox"/> holistic medicine    | <input type="checkbox"/> the Celestine Prophecy   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Buddhism           | <input type="checkbox"/> Hinduism             | <input type="checkbox"/> Osho / Baghwan           |